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A MASTER PLAN FOR

GUILFORD COURTHOUSE

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK • GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

The British charged into the American Third Line across these fields in some of the heaviest fighting of the battle.

A MASTER PLAN FOR

GUILFORD COURT-HOUSE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

1968

U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

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On March 15, 1781, at Guilford Courthouse, a tiny crossroads of a few hundred souls in the North Carolina forest, Continentals and militia under Gen. Nathanael Greene clashed with the redcoats of Lord Cornwallis in one of the decisive battles of the American Revolution. After some two hours of fighting, Greene's army withdrew and left the British in possession of the field. For ground of no strategic value, the British paid with staggering casualties: one-fourth of his superb army, a large number of them officers. "Another such victory," said Charles James Fox, a leader of the Whig opposition in London, "would ruin the British Army." Weakened by his losses, with incipient Loyalist sentiment effectively choked off, and his plan of campaign in the Carolinas overthrown, Cornwallis soon marched out of North Carolina into Virginia. Seven months later he was bottled up at Yorktown by a combined French and American force under George Washington.

More than a century passed before a move of any scope was made to preserve the scene of the fighting. The park that we know today owes its origins to the work of David Schenck of Greensboro, a judge and close student of the battle. After visiting the field one day in 1886, Judge Schenck decided to buy the site before it was lost entirely. Before sundown he had rescued 30 acres, the nucleus of what would eventually become Guilford Courthouse National Military Park.

Nathanael Greene Monument.

Judge Schenck and his friends soon formed the Guilford Battleground Company and petitioned the State legislature for a charter. On March 7, 1887, the legislature granted the company corporate status "for the benevolent purpose of preserving and adorning the grounds on and over which the battle of 'Guilford Court House' was fought." This act authorized the company to erect on the battlefield "monuments, tombstones, or other memorials to commemorate the heroic deeds of the American patriots who participated in this battle for liberty and independence." Over the next three decades, the company flourished in the community, largely because of Schenck's leadership. Some 30 monuments were placed, a small museum opened, and several prominent North Carolinians—among them two signers of the Declaration of Independence—reinterred on the battlefield.

The company first sought to have the battlefield accorded national recognition in 1910. Several bills were introduced in Congress that year to transfer the property to the Federal Government. Seven years later legislation was finally passed creating the National Military Park. The Battleground Company transferred its property to the government and went out of business.

The War Department was the first administrator of the property for the Federal Government. Their role ended in 1933 when Guilford Courthouse—in common with a number of other battlefield properties administered by various Federal agencies—was transferred to the National Park Service. Though working under several obvious limitations, the Park Service has sought to restore the battlefield as closely as possible to its historical appearance. Several important tracts have been added to the park, many trees planted, open fields maintained, and a number of interpretive improvements made.

This report, a summary of a recent master plan study, outlines the main concepts that will guide the management and future development of the park. Its proposals fall into five categories: land acquisition, historical restoration, interpretation, visitor protection, and staffing.

The proposals for land acquisition will make it possible to reroute local traffic around the central part of the battlefield, restore and interpret that part of the field held by the American Third Line, close off disruptive access roads, and design a one-way historical tour around the park.

Two historical traces and various fields and woods must be restored for the success of the interpretive program. This work can proceed only after the bypass along the northern edge of the park is constructed.

Interpretive services for visitors will be greatly improved if the visitor center is expanded and several tour routes—for autos, bicycles, and hikers—are developed.

Visitor safety will be greatly improved by the new traffic patterns spelled out in this plan.

For the expanded interpretive program and the added maintenance and protective responsibilities, more park staff will be needed.

The battle of Guilford Courthouse is the story of a battle lost but a campaign won, fought between an American general—Nathanael Greene—who never won a general engagement and a British commander—Lord Cornwallis—who rarely lost one. Coming as it did on the heels of British reverses at Kings Mountain and Cowpens, the battle dampened Cornwallis' enthusiasm for campaigning in the Carolinas. When he abandoned North Carolina and marched into Virginia, intent on striking rebellion at what he considered its critical point, Greene moved into South Carolina, tying down the British forces there and preventing supplies and reinforcements from flowing northward to Cornwallis. Greene thus served Washington's strategy of a combined French and American offensive in the last great action of the war, the siege of Yorktown.

In 1778, the inconclusiveness of the struggle in the North and the prospects of attracting wide Loyalist support led the British to carry the war into the South. If Georgia and the Carolinas could be subdued, thought one strategist, "all America to the south of the Susquehanna would return to their allegiance, and . . . the northern provinces might be left to their own feelings and distress to bring them back to their duty." By mid-1780 the British had conquered all of Georgia and most of South Carolina, including the key cities of Savannah and Charleston. Only patriot guerrilla bands offered any effective opposition.

Scene of the Southern Campaign, 1780-81.

To salvage their sinking fortunes in the South, the Continental Congress sent out Gen. Horatio Gates, the victor at Saratoga, in July 1780. By August he had assembled twice as many troops in North Carolina as his opponent, Cornwallis, but most were militia, not regulars, and he lacked adequate arms and supplies. When the two armies clashed at Camden, S.C., in the middle of the month, the defeat could not have been more disastrous for the Americans. Gates' shattered army could offer no further resistance to Cornwallis in South Carolina.

As it turned out, Camden was the high point of the British campaign in the South. Encouraged by his victory, Cornwallis set off northward with his army, hoping to uncover Loyalist sentiment in North Carolina and Virginia, and, by routing any other patriot army in the field, permanently turn the tide of the war in the South.

In September Cornwallis established his headquarters at Charlotte, N.C., while sending a detachment under Patrick Ferguson after bands of frontiersmen operating against his communications in the Carolina backcountry. On October 7, 1780, the aroused mountaineers attacked Ferguson in his trenches on the slopes of Kings Mountain, and in a few hours of savage fighting wiped out his entire force. Startled by the resurgence of patriot strength, Cornwallis now withdrew a short distance into South Carolina, his plans for the winter campaign wrecked. He still held, though, to his larger strategic purposes of driving into North Carolina, Virginia, and beyond, putting down rebel armies wherever he found them until he and Sir Henry Clinton could join forces to have a go at the main American army under George Washington.

With the time gained by the Kings Mountain victory, the patriots began to pull together their shattered army. Nathanael Greene, a trusted aide of Washington, took over Gates' command. Like Gates, he found the army, except for the cavalry, deficient in nearly all the requisites of war. Worse, the people of the region, partly out of sad experience with British foragers, were reluctant to furnish supplies. Until he could ready his army, Greene pursued a strategy of maneuver, determined to keep the enemy on the move and by a show of vigor to retain the support of the people.

When he broke camp at Charlotte in late December 1780, Greene split his army, sending one wing under Daniel Morgan toward Cornwallis' western outposts. Against Morgan, Cornwallis counterposed a force of his own: a detachment of dragoons under Banastre Tarleton. He hoped to trap Morgan between his force and Tarleton's. At Cowpens, a grazing pasture 30 miles west of Kings Mountain, Morgan found a battlefield suited to his force and confidently awaited Tarleton's attack. In less than an hour's fighting on January 17, 1781, Morgan gave Tarleton's veterans a sound beating, almost destroying his entire force and capturing a huge quantity of stores and arms.

Morgan now set out to rejoin the main body of Greene's army. Cornwallis pursued him all the way but never drew near. Twenty-three days later the two halves of the patriot army made contact at Guilford Courthouse and moved off together toward Virginia, seeking refuge behind the Dan River. Cornwallis expected to trap the Americans at the fords on the river's lower reaches, but Greene turned toward the lower river and crossed on boats hurriedly collected. Five days after leaving Guilford Courthouse, Greene and his 2,000 hungry, ragged men stood in comparative safety on the north bank of the Dan.

Reluctant to enter Virginia, where powerful combinations could be mounted against him, Cornwallis retired to Hillsboro and sought to rally the dwindling numbers of Loyalists and to reprovision his tired army. In a few days, after little success at raising either supplies or recruits, Cornwallis picked up the march again.

Over the next several weeks, the armies maneuvered for position while waiting for reinforcements to reach them. Because Greene kept the fords of the Dan to the rear, Cornwallis could not compel him to stand and fight—until Greene was ready. When his last reinforcements arrived on March 14, Greene marched his men off to Guilford Courthouse, disposed them along the road leading from Salisbury to Hillsboro, and waited for Cornwallis.

It was the early morning of the 15th, cold and frosty, when Henry Lee's legion spied an advance guard near the Quaker settlement of New Garden, 4 miles west. After a brief skirmish, Lee fell back to the American position. Greene had posted his men in three lines along the New Garden Road, between an opening in the woods and the brow of the hill on which the courthouse stood. The first line, composed mostly of inexperienced North Carolina militia, straddled the road behind a rail fence, looking across several open fields. The flanks were anchored by cavalry under William Washington, on the right, and Lee's regulars, on the left. Four hundred yards back, and lying wholly in the dense forest, was the second line. They were Virginia militia, like the North Carolinians untrained but whose officers, for the most part, had served in the Continental Army. In the third line, Greene concentrated the weight of his army: two small brigades of Continentals, experienced and well-led. This line lay entirely north of the road along a ridge. In all, Greene had about 4,400 men. Less than a fourth, though, were experienced regulars.

Cornwallis brought to the field a smaller but far more experienced army: infantry, grenadiers, riflemen,

Greene

Tarleton's dreaded cavalry, and a detachment of artillery, altogether some 2,000 of the best British troops in America.

The battle opened about 1:30 p.m. with an artillery exchange as the redcoats formed their battlelines near the clearing in front of the American first line. At the command, the British line swept forward over the muddy open field. The North Carolinians responded with two volleys—one at 140 yards and another at 50—then fled from the field having done all that Greene had asked. The flanks fought on, in Lee's section in a small, isolated battle that lasted as long as the main engagement.

The break in the center allowed the battle to flow on to the second line, deep in the forest. There the Virginians fought well; but the British pressure slowly forced them back. At the third line, the British met the stiffest resistance of the day. Their left bore the brunt of the attack, advancing through heavy woods and broken ground. A withering fire stopped them, and then a bayonet charge drove them back into a ravine. Washington's cavalry, wielding sabers, now plunged into the confused struggle. Until Cornwallis threw some grapeshot into the melee, forestalling a rout, the Americans were getting the best of the hand-to-hand fighting.

As the Americans stabilized their right, a new threat arose on the left: a reorganized force of infantry, artillery, and cavalry preparing for a fresh assault. Greene could now either risk his army in a single charge or retire from the field, to fight again at another time and place of his own choosing. At 3:30 p.m. he ordered his men to pull back.

Though Cornwallis claimed a victory, it was at the cost of nearly 600 casualties, or a fourth of his army. His campaign had now taken a desperate turn. In London, Horace Walpole commented: "Lord Cornwallis has conquered his troops out of shoes and provisions and himself out of troops." To refit his tired army, Cornwallis marched off to Wilmington. After a few days Greene broke off pursuit and led his army into South Carolina, where he set about driving the British out of that State. Six weeks later Cornwallis marched north to Virginia in consummation of his plan to prosecute the war there. Before the summer was out, Greene's hard fighting had wrested all the Carolinas, except Charleston and isolated pockets of Loyalist sentiment, from British control.

Historical Remains

The battle was fought over an area roughly two miles by one mile in extent which lay west of the original courthouse. The park's present boundaries embrace the ground on which the important fighting at the American Second and Third Lines took place. Other historical land—notably the sites on which the British formed for attack, the American First Line stood, and the flank actions occurred—is occupied by residences or other development.

The original courthouse was built here in 1774 on what was then the main route from Hillsboro, the colonial capital, to Salisbury, the seat of Rowan County. This stretch of the route was known as the New Garden Road, referring to the Quaker settlement of New Garden, a few miles west. At the time of the battle a few houses were clustered around the courthouse. Small bodies of troops had camped here occasionally during the war, and arms and supplies were stored here.

The courthouse site is within the park, but the only identifiable remains are the depressions of two small wells. New Garden Road, the axis of the battle, runs through the park for about a mile, generally following its original location except for slight adjustments. This new construction, while it has disturbed the terrain, has done little harm to the battlefield because earthworks were not employed in the fighting. The only surviving historical structure in the vicinity is the Hoskins House, a quarter of a mile outside the west boundary. The house is thought to have been used at a hospital for some wounded during the battle.

THE PARK SETTING

This master plan comes at an opportune time in the park's development. Guilford Courthouse is no remote greensward, far removed from the dynamics of its metropolitan region. It lies on the edge of Greensboro, a city of 135,000 people, in the midst of the fast-growing North Carolina piedmont. Within a 35-mile radius live another 350,000 people. This growth gives urgency to some of the planning concepts discussed later in this report. Important tracts of land should be acquired and traffic patterns altered while it is still possible to do so without disturbing local interests.

From the best estimates available, most park visitors come from nearby communities. As a percentage of total visits, such local use varies from 60 percent during the summer season to 85 percent during the late fall and winter. In the spring many school groups visit the park. Nearly half a million people visited the park in 1967. By 1975, the bicentennial of the American Revolution, nearly three-quarters of a million visitors are expected at the park.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

At Guilford Courthouse, the Park Service will offer visitors an opportunity to understand the course of the March 15, 1781, battle and to appreciate its effects on subsequent British strategy and the eventual outcome of the war. The park will be managed according to standard Park Service policies for historical areas. These objectives, until modified as time and experience may suggest, will guide the various management and development programs.

Resource Management

1. To preserve and where possible to restore the battlefield scene as nearly as possible to its appearance on March 15, 1781.
2. To develop historical collections related to the battle and associated sites.

Interpretation

1. To complete the historical research program so that fundamental information will be available as needed to support interpretive and management activities.
2. To relate the story of the battle as effectively as possible to as wide an audience as possible.
3. To carry the park story into nearby communities through an expanded program of talks and other personal programs.

Visitor Facilities

1. To expand the visitor center for better interpretive and staff use.
2. To construct a road system that will remove non-park traffic from interpretive tours and offer a safer and more logical tour of the battlefield.

Administration

1. To participate in city, county, and other local planning efforts to help insure the quality of the park's environment.
2. To cooperate with local organizations and State and other Federal agencies in pursuit of historical preservation, conservation, and other programs of mutual interest.
3. To staff the park adequately to accomplish the foregoing programs.

Basic Planning Considerations

Much of the following plan stems from the need to deal with three related situations which greatly influence the nature and quality of most visitors' experience of the park: the unsuitable traffic patterns within the park, certain incompatible land uses near the park, and the generally inadequate interpretive facilities. By acquiring some lands and exchanging others, commuter traffic can be removed from the heart of the battlefield, the historical scene can be restored, and a safer and more effective interpretive tour route can be installed. Together with the expanded and redesigned visitor center, these solutions should make for better interpretation of the battle and more efficient administration of the battlefield. For the visitor, these improvements should offer a more meaningful park experience.

Resource Management

Perhaps the most important management task at Guilford Courthouse is to recreate the battlefield scene as it existed on March 15, 1781. On such a restoration rests the entire interpretive plan for the park and a good deal of the visitor's enjoyment.

Two factors complicate this objective: only about half of the original battleground lies inside the park's boundaries, and a number of facilities —a visitor center, roads, and residences—are necessary for park operations.

Although in this plan some new land would be acquired (most of it by exchange with the city) and more roads constructed, lands would be acquired and facilities built only insofar as they contribute to overall interpretive purposes at the park. Their contribution to the interpretive process will thus outweigh whatever intrusion they make on the historical scene.

The land exchange proposal between the city of Greensboro and the National Park Service is critical to the park's new interpretive plan. As now contemplated, the plan would work like this: the Park Service would exchange 16.8 acres of land north of Greensboro Country Park to the city for 11.7 acres between Holt Avenue and New Garden Road. The city would benefit by acquiring land necessary to the proper development of the Country Park, and the Park Service would benefit by acquiring land vital both to properly interpret the battle (the American Third Line and Washington's cavalry fought there) and to close off undesirable accesses.

Another parcel of land—on the northeast corner of the park—will be sought by the Park Service to allow for the relocation of the New Garden Road. Because a great deal of local traffic now uses the present road, considerably detracting from the atmosphere the Park Service wants to maintain within the park, the master plan proposes that this section of the New Garden Road be relocated along the northern edge of the park, eliminating vehicles entirely from the center of the park. The road will then be restored as a historic trace.

Another historic trace that should be restored is the road used by General Greene in his retreat. This road ran from the New Garden Road past the courthouse. There is no evidence of it on the ground today, but if research can accurately locate it, the road should be restored and interpreted.

One important goal of the restoration program is to maintain where present now and to recreate where absent the historical vegetative cover on the battlefield. An oak forest, with thick undergrowth, dominated, as it does today, the area between the First and Third Lines. The open fields along the Third Line and around the courthouse site, however, were somewhat larger during the battle. These will be enlarged and maintained in an abandoned field state, as prescribed by research. New lands, as they are acquired, will be given the same treatment: modern construction will be obliterated and the historic scene will be restored in accordance with the findings of research.

Interpretation

Guilford Courthouse is the story of a campaign as much as it is of a single battle. Interpretation here—the public explanations offered through field tours, publications, exhibits, films—will deal not only with the battle but also with the larger theme of the collapse of the British strength in the South. The interested visitor should not only understand what happened here, but how the battle came about, and what results flowed from it. Another important theme will also be

How the proposed addition to the visitor center might look.

covered: Gen. Nathanael Greene as a strategist and Revolutionary War leader. This and other themes illustrating the human side of the war will be presented as time and space permit. It is expected that this program will, by its excellence, attract a wide audience in the region as well as travelers from afar with a special interest in the Revolutionary War.

A good part of the interpretive program will take place within the visitor center. Because the present building is inadequate, the Park Service proposes to add a wing for interpretive meetings and exhibits and to redesign the main structures for offices. The accompanying rendering gives a general idea of how this might be done.

For full appreciation of the battle—not to speak of an understanding—nothing can replace walking over the battlefield, inspecting the landmarks and measuring with one's own legs the distances and obstacles that the armies knew. Two new tours are outlined by this master plan. Both are dependent for their effectiveness on the land acquisitions previously mentioned and the construction of the bypass, which will lessen the amount of vehicular traffic in the heart of the battlefield.

The one-way auto tour, beginning at the visitor center, will have seven stops and as many themes:

1. First Line: The opening of the battle.
2. The action on the American left.
3. Second Line: The story of the Virginia Militia.
4. The withdrawal of Campbell's men.
5. Third Line: The climax of the battle.
6. The retreat of Greene's army.
7. The site of Guilford Courthouse.

If a bicycle rental shop is opened in the neighboring city park, a bikeway paralleling the auto route will be built.

This plan also proposes a self-guided walking trail. Beginning at the visitor center, it will cover generally the area of the Second and Third Lines and the monuments on the west side of the park. It will have seven themes:

1. The British advance beyond the Second Line.
2. The role of British artillery.
3. The British form for attack.
4. The American Third Line.
5. The First Maryland stops the British advance.
6. Advance of the British Guards.
7. Historic trace.

Most conducted tours will use this trail.

Other forms of interpretation will receive emphasis: museum talks, conducted field trips, and offsite programs will be expanded as time and resources permit. Special children's programs—both for elementary and high school students—will be developed. Scholars and others with more than a passing interest should find the historical collections in the new visitor center more readily available for study.

Other Public Use

Access and Circulation

From an interpretive standpoint, the park has far too many entrances. Some eight roads enter the park, carrying considerable traffic not concerned with the park. Construction of the bypass and the one-way tour road will help remedy this situation. There will then be only two auto entrances, New Garden Road and Battleground Road. Both will carry motorists directly to the visitor center. This circulation system will require a new sign system (both within the park and on the major arteries outside) and more parking space. The master plan makes provision for both needs, as shown on the General Development Plan.

Recreation

Functionally, the National Military Park and Greensboro Country Park complement each other. The neighboring city park has the facilities for the kind of recreation that is inappropriate at the historical park. If the land exchanges described elsewhere in this report are carried out, the roles will be even more clearly defined. The land presently used for the zoo would be returned to its historical character, while the 17 acres the Park Service would exchange with the city would be used for city park purposes. Because both parks will benefit by the exchange, both should better serve the public.

Law Enforcement

Of 220 acres in the park, the National Park Service exercises exclusive jurisdiction over 125 acres. The rest is under either concurrent or proprietary jurisdiction. For greater latitude in various legal matters, the Service will seek concurrent jurisdiction with the State over the entire park.

Administration

The developments outlined here and the expected rise in public visits will inevitably require staff increases. More interpreters will be needed for the programs in the visitor center; a ranger will be needed for visitor safety and resource protection work; more maintenance workers will be required for the new facilities. To some extent, these needs can be met by seasonal employment. Permanent personnel will be required for most positions.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

New Garden Road bypass
Lawndale Drive
Battleground Road
Third Line Historical Trail
6
7
restored
historical field
3e
visitor
center
5
maintenance
residence
Nathanael Greene
Monument
Orman Drive
amphitheater
4
New Garden Road
1
3
3d
Nathanael
Greene Drive
Holt Avenue
3c
Winston
Monument
Wiley
Drive
Greensboro Country Park
2
Forest Lawn Cemetery
Land to be purchased by NPS
NPS land to be exchanged for city land
City land to be exchanged for NPS land
Bicycle path
Restored historical trace
Foot path
Permanent building
Building to be obliterated
Road to be obliterated
Park area
Southern Railroad
0
600
scale in feet

General Development Plan

The following comments refer to the General Development Plan above. That plan shows the park after it has been developed, after several roads have been relocated, the old beds obliterated, and other intrusions eliminated.

ROADS

1. *New Garden Road bypass* To accommodate local traffic and ease congestion in the heart of the battlefield, about a mile of the present New Garden Road will be relocated along the north side of the park.
2. *One-way auto tour* Three sections of new road construction are necessary to complete the loop: (a) From Battleground Road to New Garden Road; (b) The connection to Holt Avenue; (c) The connection from New Garden Road to the bypass.
3. *Road obliteration* Six stretches of road will be obliterated: (a) From Battleground Road east to the junction with the tour route. (b) From the tour road to Battleground Road in the southwestern area of the park. (c) The road encircling the Winston Monument and the connections with the zoo and Greensboro Country Park. (d) The road in the present zoo, once the land exchange is complete (e) The section of road at the eastern entrance to the park. (f) The north end of the abandoned Nathanael Greene Drive and the roads and driveways in the theater and go-cart track.

PARKING

4. Enlarge the main parking area at the visitor center to accommodate 40 cars and two buses and provide six smaller parking areas along the tour route.

BUILDINGS

5. Enlarge the visitor center to provide space for expanded interpretation and information services.
6. Remove all remaining buildings on the new lands except the fire station along Lawndale Drive.

TRAILS

7. Complete the Third Line Historical Trail.
8. Develop a bicycle trail around the park as shown on the General Development Plan.
9. After the bypass is constructed and the present New Garden Road is obliterated, restore the historical trace through the middle of the park.

GROUNDS

10. Restore the historical setting in two areas of the park; the fields in the southeast corner and along the Third Line and the forest cover in the area of the zoo, after the land exchange.
11. Reconstruct the historical fences in the southeast corner of the park.

AUTO TOUR

① First Line
② American left
③ Second Line
④ Campbell's withdrawal
⑤ Third Line
⑥ Greene's retreat
⑦ Guilford Courthouse

The Department of the Interior—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

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